



Seattle City Council

May 1, 2012

Ray Hoffman, Director
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Seattle, WA 98124-4018

Dannette R. Smith, Director
Human Services Department (HSD)
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Dear Ray and Dannette:

This letter follows-up on recent discussions by the Energy and Environment Committee and the Libraries, Utilities and Center (LUC) Committee regarding HSD's response to 2012 budget Statement of Legislative Intent 54-1-A-1. The response presented an assessment of the enrollment and outreach of HSD's low-income Utility Discount Program (UDP) in light of newly implemented business practices.

Although UDP efficiency appears to be improving, more progress is needed to meet the City's goal of providing easy access to discounted rates for eligible, low-income customers. While HSD continues to track and refine its new practices, the LUC Committee is interested in two changes that should be made in the next few months:

- 1. Senior Re-enrollment.** We have heard from low-income senior citizens about the difficulty of re-enrolling in the UDP every 18 months, as is currently required.¹ Seniors typically live on fixed incomes with limited prospects for changing their income status. To verify continued eligibility while reducing the burden of overly frequent re-enrollment, the LUC Committee requests re-enrollment for seniors be conducted on a 3 year schedule.

¹ See "Applicant Says Seattle Discount Program Offers No Relief This Winter," KUOW, Feb. 3, 2012 (available at: <http://kuow.org/program.php?id=2587>).



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2. **Effective date of discount.** LUC Committee members also have heard of months-long delays between a customer's first inquiry about the UDP and the time when they are officially enrolled and receiving rate discounts. Paying the full price for utilities during this period (during which the customer is eligible for low-income assistance) can be a substantial burden for struggling families. The LUC Committee requests that rate discounts be retroactive to the date when an eligible customer submits a complete UDP application.

We understand that there may be implementation issues that might require further discussion and refinement of these enrollment and billing changes. We look forward to working with you to resolve those issues, further improve the Utility Discount Program, and extend rate assistance to more of our City's eligible, low-income utility customers.

Thank you for your immediate attention to these important changes.

Sincerely,

Jean Godden
Chair, Libraries, Utilities and Center Committee

Richard Conlin
Vice-Chair, LUC Committee

Sally Bagshaw
Member, LUC Committee

CC: Sally Clark, President, Seattle City Council